Reviewer's report

Title: Expanded Tri-lobed Flap for Ear Reconstruction: An Animal Model in Rabbit

Version: 2 Date: 9 September 2003

Reviewer: Raymund E. Horch

Reviewer's report:

General

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

The question posed by the authors is relatively new and well defined. The methods are appropriate and well described and sufficient details are provided to replicate the work. The data are sound, but not well controlled. There are no statistical evaluations, possibly due to the low number of animals. The manuscript seems to adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition, but the results section is very short. This may also be due to the relatively low number of experimental animals. The title and abstract do convey what has been found, but there are statements at the end of both the abstract and the manuscript text at the end of the "Conclusion" that do not fit into the rest of the manuscript. The authors claim that they have developed a unique animal model for ear reconstruction but conclude that this flap is useful in patients. They should make the point more clear that they could propose a possible use of this type of flap in the human patient, but make clear that their findings rely on an animal model and that clinical use - as from the content of the manuscript - has not taken place so far. Secondly the question of an internal framework is risen, but unfortunately at the end of the paper in the conclusions section, where they state that they used a porous polyethylene scaffold in one animal to allow for complete alloplastic ear reconstruction. In there is no statement in which one of the both groups this animal belongs, and no technical advice is found in the Materials and Methods section. There is no scientific question behind this procedure, and if it was to prove the superiority of alloplastic materials there is no control group. Besides any potential question regarding the framework in ear reconstruction cannot be answered with one single animal. I strongly recommend the authors to think over this aspect of the paper. This question needs to be discussed in the discussion section! It does not make too much sense to add this information based on one single animal including the methods and results at the end of the paper. If the authors want to underline the value of their technique of scaffolding, they should set up a study design to prove the use of Medpor in their model and resubmit the paper. If they do not want to do more animal studies what would definitely point out the scientific value of their work, they should either add the comment "preliminary results" to their work or make it more clear that this is only a proof of principle.

Although this article is of worth for the medical community and should be considered for publication in BioMedCentral I would

Advice on publication: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have
responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: A paper whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

Declaration of competing interests:

None